



**AWF Position Statement:
On the Trade in African Great Apes**

17 October 2014

Position:

The African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) condemns the wild capture and trafficking of great apes and considers any involvement in the illegal live great ape trade a serious crime. Great ape trafficking has received relatively little attention compared to other wildlife trafficking crimes, though it operates according to the same supply-and-demand rules. Like other wildlife crimes, it persists due to corruption, as well as a lack of resources, capacity and incentive to enforce national laws and international trade regulations, which forbid the commercial trade in great apes. The capture and transport of live great apes to domestic and international markets undermines the stability of ecosystems and economies, encourages societal corruption, enriches a shadowy trade network of criminals, puts already threatened apes at greater risk, and otherwise constitutes a brutal and inhumane way of treating our closest relatives. Furthermore, the ability for diseases to pass between wildlife, especially non-human primates, and human beings means that the live animal trade poses a public health risk.

AWF calls on international monitoring, regulatory and enforcement agencies to dedicate the resources necessary over the next five years to halt this brutal trade; close down markets in origin, transit and destination countries; and build capacity in law enforcement at the national level to ensure Africa's natural heritage remains secure.

The Issue:

The African continent is home to four of the world's six great apes. These include the bonobo, the western gorilla, the eastern gorilla and the chimpanzee.* Among the four species groups, there exist nine subspecies. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classifies all of Africa's great ape subspecies as either endangered or critically endangered, and, with the exception of the mountain gorilla whose numbers have been increasing over the past decade, the populations of all subspecies are declining. Major threats to Africa's great apes include bushmeat hunting, habitat loss, disease transmission from humans, and the illegal live animal trade. While habitat loss and the bushmeat trade remain the biggest threats to great ape survival, the illegal wildlife trade constitutes a growing threat of real concern.

* The other two great apes—the Sumatran and Bornean orangutan—are found in Asia.

For many years, the trade in African great apes was considered a by-product of the bushmeat trade, wherein infants orphaned during poaching raids were opportunistically sold into the pet trade. Now, however, a systematic and persistent illegal trade in Africa's great apes has emerged and has steadily increased over the last decade. While the actual scale and scope of the overall great ape trade is unknown, it is believed to be widespread. According to "Stolen Apes," a 2013 Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP) report published by the UN Environment Programme, many trafficked great apes will either reach their destination undetected or else die during the trafficking process. Conservative estimates suggest that as many as 22,000 great apes were captured, confiscated, lost or killed during the trafficking process between 2005 and 2011.[†] Zoos, amusement parks, research facilities, exotic pet collectors and the entertainment industry, predominately in Asia, the Middle East and areas of Eastern Europe, are driving this brutal demand.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, or CITES lists all great apes as Appendix I species, meaning their commercial trade is banned. A growing body of evidence, however, confirms that transborder commercial trade *is* happening, facilitated by a network of local and international smugglers and corrupt officials. The easy falsification of CITES trade documents aids the trade and lends an air of legitimacy to otherwise illegal deals. Additionally, while CITES monitors, reports on and regulates international trade in species, its mandate does not extend to domestic trade.

At the national level, though laws exist that prohibit trade in great apes, there is generally a lack of capacity, resources and incentive to forcefully implement those laws. Customs officials, border agents, police officers, magistrates and other members of the law enforcement establishment often do not have enough understanding of the law or the crime itself—or simply may not have the capacity—to enforce existing regulations effectively. They furthermore may not know of or understand the mechanisms by which they can reclaim their nation's stolen natural assets.

Addressing a problem begins first with acknowledging that there is a problem. The public awareness campaigns around elephant and rhino poaching and ivory and rhino horn trafficking have driven media coverage of poaching and the illegal wildlife trade, spurred action by governments worldwide on the issue, and increased resources toward the goals of stopping the killing, stopping the trafficking and stopping the demand. Similar visibility is now needed to lift the issue of great ape trafficking out of the shadows. Only then can great ape trafficking in Africa and Asia be recognized, quantified, exposed and closed.

[†] Stiles, D., Redmond, I., Cress, D., Nellemann, C., Formo, R.K. (eds). 2013. *Stolen Apes — The Illicit Trade in Chimpanzees, Gorillas, Bonobos and Orangutans*. A Rapid Response Assessment. United Nations Environment Programme, GRID-Arendal. www.grida.no

Recommendations:

Today, the scale and brutality of the illegal trade in great apes underscore the urgent need to tackle this issue now. AWF strongly recommends the following actions be taken without delay:

INCREASE VISIBILITY & SENSITIZATION:

- Increase visibility among the general public and media, particularly in great ape range and demand countries, to sensitize them to the issue and the plight of Africa's great apes
- Support and increase visibility of the illegal great ape trade database, developed by GRASP, which will quantify the scale of the trade as it tracks and makes available to the public all confiscations, deaths and losses of trafficked apes, as well as those illegally held in captivity

ENHANCE LAW ENFORCEMENT AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:

- In line with the recommendation from GRASP's "Stolen Apes" report, range and demand countries, with support from governmental and non-governmental groups, should designate national customs units that prioritize and investigate environmental crimes and ensure full application of wildlife laws.
- Range and demand countries should adopt a zero-tolerance policy for those who knowingly violate CITES and/or national regulations around great ape trade.
- Range countries, with support and expertise from governmental and non-governmental organizations, should reclaim and repatriate their trafficked great apes.

IMPROVE AND ENHANCE TRADE OVERSIGHT AND REGULATION:

- Establish a Great Ape Working Group under CITES, which will permit more detailed discussion around CITES regulatory processes and how to make it more effective at controlling fraudulent use of CITES permits
- Tighten CITES great ape trade regulation practices, improve reporting processes and make import/export permits subject to senior level inspection before removing wildlife from a country
- Revise and strengthen CITES permitting and reporting procedures around live species trade to eliminate fraudulent trade deals

African Great Apes Status:

Chimpanzee

SUBSPECIES: Eastern chimpanzee, Central chimpanzee, Cameroon-Nigeria chimpanzee, West African chimpanzee

IUCN RED LIST STATUS: Endangered

POPULATION SIZE: Between 294,800 and 431,100 individuals
RANGE: West Africa, Central Africa, East Africa

Bonobo

IUCN RED LIST: Endangered
POPULATION SIZE: Between 15,000 and 30,000 individuals
RANGE: Democratic Republic of Congo

Eastern gorilla

SUBSPECIES: Mountain gorilla and Grauer's (or Eastern Lowland) gorilla
IUCN RED LIST: Mountain gorilla, critically endangered. Grauer's gorilla, endangered.
POPULATION SIZE: Mountain gorilla, 880 individuals. Grauer's gorilla, between 2,000 and 10,000 individuals
RANGE: Central/East Africa

Western gorilla

SUBSPECIES: Western Lowland gorilla and Cross River gorilla
IUCN RED LIST: Western Lowland gorilla, critically endangered. Cross River gorilla, critically endangered.
POPULATION SIZE: Western Lowland gorilla, 150,000 individuals. Cross River gorilla, between 200 and 300 individuals
RANGE: West/Central Africa

In Summary:

The great apes are our closest relatives and share many of the emotions and traits similar to humans, including empathy, happiness, sadness, pain and a need for social interaction and companionship. Great ape trafficking, like human trafficking, condemns its victims to a life in captivity, often in miserable conditions. For far too long, the issue of great ape trafficking has not been given the attention it deserves. Public and media awareness of the elephant ivory and rhino horn trafficking issue have helped to mobilize resources and spurred government action worldwide toward stopping the killing, stopping the trafficking and stopping the demand. The same attention must now be on the illegal trade in great apes. The African Wildlife Foundation urges the CITES Secretariat, range and destination countries, conservation organizations and others to combat great ape trafficking with the same degree of urgency, dedication of resources, and attention that they apply to other types of wildlife trafficking.